

Lithuania Ready for Kremlin Talks

Separatist Legislature Responds Politely but Firmly to Gorbachev

By Michael Dobbs
Washington Post Foreign Service

MOSCOW, April 5—Lithuania's legislature said tonight that it is prepared to discuss the content of its controversial declaration of independence with Kremlin representatives to determine whether it violated the Soviet constitution and international law.

The Lithuanian proposal was contained in a telegram sent to President Mikhail Gorbachev in reply to last Saturday's message from the Soviet leader demanding that the Baltic republic rescind its March 11 proclamation of independence. But the Lithuanian authorities criticized the behavior of the Soviet armed forces in Lithuania, describing the show of military strength as "unauthorized."

Over the past two weeks, elite paratrooper units and Interior Ministry troops have taken over half a dozen public buildings in the Lithuanian capital, Vilnius. Today the Soviet army strengthened its hold on the offices of the Lithuanian public prosecutor, expelling all officials loyal to the Lithuanian government and stationing about 50 soldiers inside the building.

Lithuanian President Vytautas Landsbergis accused Moscow last week of trying to "destroy the Lithuanian justice system" by replacing the Lithuanian prosecutor and posting troops outside the building. Over the past week, prosecutors loyal to both Vilnius and Moscow have been allowed into the building.

The trial of strength over the prosecutor's office has a symbolic importance as it is the first time

that the Kremlin has sought to close down an important branch of the Lithuanian administration. The ownership of other buildings taken over by the Soviet army is disputed between Lithuanian Communists who broke away from the Moscow party late last year and the party's pro-Moscow minority.

In Saturday's message to the Lithuanian legislature, Gorbachev warned of "grave consequences for all of us" unless the chamber repealed its "illegal" attempt to secede. He said that a reconsideration of the independence proclamation could pave the way for negotiations between Moscow and Vilnius.

Senior Lithuanian representatives were received by a key Gorbachev aide, Alexander Yakovlev, on Tuesday, raising hopes that a compromise might be found. But today Yakovlev issued a statement describing the meeting as merely an unofficial "conversation."

Today's reply to Gorbachev by the Lithuanian Supreme Council, as the republic's Supreme Soviet renamed itself when it declared independence March 11, was polite in tone but unyielding in substance. It reiterated Lithuania's call for "an honest dialogue" between Vilnius and Moscow, but argued that this should not be accompanied by "unauthorized actions of your armed forces."

Over the past two weeks, the army has paraded light tanks and armored cars through the center of Vilnius and used military helicopters to urge Lithuanians to attend anti-independence demonstrations. The military activity has not been sanctioned by the Supreme Soviet in Moscow, but there is no evidence to

suggest that army commanders have been acting behind Gorbachev's back.

"The Supreme Council of Lithuania is ready to discuss both the essence and the detail of decisions and decrees adopted by the Supreme Council of the Republic of Lithuania from the point of view both of international law and the Soviet constitution," the telegram added.

Lithuanian officials maintain that their independence declaration was fully in keeping with the Soviet constitution, which gives the country's republics the right to secede from the union. The Kremlin insists that Lithuania must also go through elaborate procedures, including a five-year cooling-off period, contained in a tough new law on secession adopted on Tuesday by the all-union parliament.

[In Warsaw, Sen. Alfonse D'Amato (R-N.Y.) announced that he will try to drive into Lithuania on Friday using a Lithuanian visa, the Associated Press reported. The Soviet government has closed the single highway crossing from Poland, Lithuania's only border with a foreign country, and does not recognize Lithuanian visas.]

In neighboring Latvia, meanwhile, the local Communist Party appears to be on the verge of splitting into pro- and anti-independence factions following the pattern already set in Lithuania and Estonia. Gorbachev summoned Latvia's Communist Party leaders to Moscow Wednesday for talks prior to their emergency congress, which opens Friday in Riga, but appears to have been unsuccessful in his attempt to prevent a break.